Organizational Culture Change
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Organizational Culture Change

Unleash your organization’s potential in circles of 10

MARCELLA BREMER

Zwolle MMXII
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Welcome to this pragmatic user’s guide to organizational culture change. This book wasn’t written to be read... it evolved from my pragmatic, hands–on workshops and it is meant to be DONE. It is a practical user’s guide, audio–recorded while I was talking to my workshop students. Beyond the pile of beautifully written change management books or academic theories, I simply tell you my experiences as a consultant on culture change and what can happen in reality.

I aim for achieving sustainable, that is, successful change. You may have heard of the infamous failure rate of organizational change programs that don’t deliver what they promised: between 50–75% Change programs often fail because their approach is too conceptual, too large and too wide.

My approach is to keep change small, personal and focused on specific behaviors in peer groups of 10 trusted coworkers. But nothing will happen if you don’t take action. So here’s one piece of advice for starters: Just do it! Moreover: do it together, in “change circles” of 10 people.

The basic tool I use as a starting point for change is the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI), developed by Professor Kim Cameron and Professor Robert Quinn and elaborately described in their book “Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture – based on the Competing Values Framework”.

The OCAI serves as a starting point. But it is “only” a starter. Working with clients all over the world, I have elaborated on Cameron and Quinn’s approach of dialogues after the OCAI survey into workshops and a 7–Step–Guide to effective Culture Change.

This book isn’t simply telling you WHAT to do: we suggest HOW you could do it. But the exact detailed HOW–TO is entirely up to you and needs customization for your organization. And above all: it needs to be DONE. So, welcome to all of you fellow consultants, trainers, managers, team leaders, HR managers, executives, supervisors, students, coaches and coworkers.

Let’s develop the workplace and the world!

Marcella Bremer MScBA
Praise for this book

“Your helping to make accessible and applicable 30 years of research on the Competing Values Framework is a very important undertaking. You are doing a great service to the field.”

Warmest wishes, Professor Kim Cameron PhD MA MSc
Associate Dean, William Russell Professor of Management & Organizations
at Ross School of Business, and Professor of Higher Education, School of Education, University of Michigan, United States of America

“This is an excellent book with an unusual achievement: solid foundations and logic together with practical implications, all in one. The book is packed with ideas and applications and in every page there is something not just to read but to reflect and imagine ‘the translation’ in a particular organizational challenge.

I thought the author has been generous. She could have easily written two books with the same material. The book draws on a particular understanding of cultural frameworks, usually a barrier to critical thinking since readers are inevitably forced to ‘accept’ the model in order to benefit from the content. Again, unusually, this is not the case.

There is a very solid model behind, of course, but one could read and learn ‘above and beyond the particular model’. For those of us sitting in the side of the organization as an ‘organism’ where there is no change unless there is behavioural change, the book provides both the intellectual grounds and practical toolkits to navigate.

Many people interested in Employee Engagement will also find the book very useful and hopefully will draw conclusions about the need to switch to a bottom-up, grass roots, small groups, activism model as we orchestrate in our Viral Change™ programmes.

I am sure there will be a second and third edition and most likely a great deal of conversations triggered by this excellent piece of work.”

Leandro Herrero MD MBA FCMI FloD FRSA
CEO, The Chalfont Project Ltd and Viral Change™ Global L.L.P and author of “Viral Change”, United Kingdom
“The strength of this book is that it is inspiring as well as practical. The author avoids the pitfall of unrealistic promises that characterize many books on change management. This book is a must–read for anyone who really wants to contribute to the necessary culture changes that organizations need to make in the coming era.”

Hans Wopereis, managing director ITIP Development & Consultancy, author of the Dutch book “Het licht en de korenmaat; je ziel als werkgever”, The Netherlands

“Relying on Cameron and Quinn’s Organization Culture Assessment Instrument, Marcella Bremer speaks to individual minds, but links them in an inclusive network of virtuous partnerships, circles and organizational fan clubs.

It does not hurt that she is our school’s graduate. A reasonable and useful guide if you want to manage a change of beliefs. In Bremer’s book you will find everything you always wanted to know about positive brainwashing, but were afraid to ask.”

Dr. Slawek Magala, Professor of Cross–Cultural Management and head of the Department of Organization and Personnel Sciences, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, The Netherlands

“It’s a pragmatic approach that will appeal to many and helps to deal with the issues that we stumble over during the change process. I feel that I have read just about every “change text” but I strongly recommend you read this book that brings together many of the concepts in an easy to digest “This is what you do format”.”

Denis McIvor, President of the Organisation Development Association, Australia

“Marcella makes a great contribution to the success stories on Change programmes with her work and through the ideas in this book. This a must read for people in the Change business.

Of special note are the references to the latent Leadership potential at all levels in the organisation. This book will help your thinking on how you can help create a performance Culture that really does get the best out of the people in your organisation.”

Clive Bevan, Executive Team member at New Performance Era Ltd, United Kingdom
Marcella Bremer MScBA works as a consultant guiding organizational change and personal development. Her motto is: “Develop the workers, the workplace and the world.”

She is a Master of Science of Business Administration from Rotterdam School of Management and she helps organizations and consultants diagnose and change culture, so they can utilize culture to create a great place to work in a very pragmatic, hands-on and engaging way.

She’s been using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) for years in a great variety of organizations and she felt it was time to share practical lessons learned and experiences. All cases are based on the global database of OCAI online.

“This is the book I’d like to have read in college and when starting out as a consultant in change and organization development and later on, when I managed our own team. 50–75% of Organizational Change programs fail because their approach is too conceptual, too large and too wide. My approach is to keep change small, personal and focused on specific behaviors in peer groups of 10 trusted coworkers. Circles of 10 can change the world.”
Chapter 11  Do you understand your Current Culture?

We’re now going to start our OCAI workshop. That is exciting! We will present the outcome of the assessment and start the dialogue. The first part is a short repetition of the Competing Values Framework and an overview of our profiles. Next, we’re going to work on understanding our current culture and creating the will and skill to change to the preferred culture. Our showcase is the Care Center for Disabled people, “CCD”.

We are in the workshop room. We have discussed the rules and we created a safe space. People know each other and feel comfortable, hopefully even excited to get started...

Workshop Rules

♦ Information is confidential until further notice
♦ People have different views. Right/wrong is often not applicable.
♦ Comment on issues, don’t criticize individuals
♦ Respect and listening are key

The first thing we discuss with the participants is how the assessment went. What information came up during the assessment? Were people complaining in the hallways or did they have inspired conversations like “Things are going to change.” What did your participants think of it?

Sometimes this may not be relevant. “We had to send three reminders but that was because this calamity occurred.” But sometimes it is relevant and participants can tell you that these calamities are a regular thing and may be part of a chaotic culture.

Or, another example: “We needed reminders because we have so many surveys. The CEO probably wants to keep us quiet – he throws another assessment down the line and we don’t take it seriously.” It might tell you something about their culture. The workshop starts with a short repetition of the Competing Values Framework because some time has passed between doing the assessment and the actual workshop. So we repeat the culture types for our group – as quickly or extensively as necessary to be able to work with them as a shared reference.
Next, we can check their expectations of the current and preferred culture profile. Before showing the results, you get all kinds of stories and assumptions and expectations. Most of the time, people predict the outcome before they see and recognize the actual profile.

This is all kind of warming-up to start working with current culture: to understand it and add qualitative information to customize our typical way of doing things around here. To show you an example, let me present the case of the Care Center for Disabled people, “CCD”. Let’s look at their outcome and attend their OCAI workshop.

**Case: Care Center for the Disabled**

CCD, the Care Center for Disabled people, had a staff of 300 people. Their management team consisted of 18 executives and experts. They were very committed to patients and mutual solidarity. They were in a rough market and downsizing had become necessary. New competitors were entering their region and they had tough financial targets; things were going downhill.

CCD decided to use the OCAI tool to start the change. 80 percent of their staff did the assessment in three weeks. That’s a high participation rate. They were committed to one another and to saving the organization. People talked about it a lot – “What did you get? What about my scores?” Downsizing scared them, so there were some wild tales going round.

The managing teams had to appease staff that things would work out in the end. Managers explained why it was so important that they use the OCAI as a starting point for their change. Downsizing was one thing, but what they needed for a sustainable future was a different way of “doing business” to stay out of hazards next time.

After the assessment, the managing team engaged in a workshop. They wanted to get familiar with the results first before discussing the outcome with the organization because people were already scared.

I asked them what they expected of the results. They expected to have a dominant clan culture because they recognized its strong people-focus. They expected the preferred culture to be clan culture as well, but they added: “We know we cannot go on with clan culture this way.

We face extreme difficulties and we have real challenges ahead. There is a lot of competition entering our market, there are new government regulations that we
have to meet and our financial reserves are almost gone. We do need to make more money and that’s a big challenge ahead.”

Let’s take a look at their profile. The black graph is the current culture and the dashed graph shows the preferred culture. What stands out when you look at this particular profile? They had a very dominant clan culture at the time. Also, there is little difference between current and preferred culture. This is interesting to see, especially when you think of what the management team had just told me – “We need to make a big change.”

Let’s take a look at their culture profile in numbers. They have more than 40 points of clan culture currently, 26 points of adhocracy culture and more than 20 points hierarchy culture. What they have the least of is the results–oriented market culture that scores around 13 points.

The managing team was right – they had a very dominant clan culture. Adhocracy culture came second. They valued flexibility and professional freedom. The two culture types are in the upper part of the Competing Values Framework. They like to do things in their own way and as flexible as possible. They meet their clients’ demands, even if that means going beyond the extra mile.

Current culture and preferred culture were very much alike. They didn’t want to change, really. “We do have a lot of people–oriented clan culture. Maybe we could have one point less of it...?” They’d like to have a bit more adhocracy culture and maybe they could agree on a bit more hierarchy culture. What they valued least of all is market culture – not only in current culture profile but also in the preferred situation. Market culture diminishes even further with two points.
Their culture profile was very congruent. All six aspects of culture scored highest on clan and adhocracy was second on all six culture aspects. Their profile aligned well with the health care sector as a whole. All other care institutions scored highest on clan culture. This seems to be a very good fit for this professional field.

Last but not least, the culture profile shows their phase of development. Some pioneers started the care center for disabled people – a few parents launched this organization because they wanted the best possible care for their disabled children. Because they were so dedicated to their patients/children, the organization grew rapidly because they attracted others who cared for disabled people. They grew to a staff of 300 and moved from the yellow adhocracy culture to the green clan culture.

Now, it wasn’t simply a matter of developing to the next phase and maturing into hierarchy culture, because they needed to better organize work in procedures, structure, and clarity. They also needed to change because of outside challenges – the threats from competitors and government.

New government regulations were introduced. Health care institutions didn’t receive government funding like before, so they had to make more money. Moreover, there were new competitors entering their market in this specific region. CCD needed more structure, rationality and businesslike performance – hierarchy and market culture – because they needed to survive. People didn’t want change but they had to change, whether they liked it or not.

Since current clan culture was very strong, it could take more effort to change because people hung on to it for 40 points out of 100. Their biggest challenge was that market culture, which they absolutely needed to survive, was not desired at all. The participants even wanted less targets, less hard work, less rational, businesslike performance. The diagonals in the Competing Values Framework represent a huge polarity. How to swap your friendly people-focus for a rational, competitive results-orientation?

The culture profile gave insight and recognition in the blink of an eye. The managing team said “That’s us,” and they were a bit shocked that preferred culture was so close to current, even more than they’d expected. They were sure now that people did not want to change. This was a great starting point for change...

The team’s individual profiles

The managing team started with their individual profiles because they had to develop the strategy for the care center. It was important that they as a team would
understand each other. Their individual differences were based on character, people’s position and their tasks. This was a rather large team of 18 people: managers and experts on the disabled.

Differences because of character: one member liked to keep things under control, so she preferred hierarchy culture for the future. She thought the flexibility of clan and adhocracy culture was too much. That was partly based on her personality trait; conscientiousness.

Differences due to their position: the CEO had a slightly different culture profile because he had a more results–oriented financial perspective and preferred a little more market culture. It was an eye–opener for him to see different culture profiles.

He assumed: “Everybody thinks like me.” But now, he realized: “The other team members are with me but they are not the same. They don’t share my view that we should fight for results and that our challenge is this huge.” That gave him insight. He should lead his team, but not right away into market culture, if he wanted their buy–in.

Other team members got insights as well. Some people said: “I thought I was very results–oriented but what I really value is the personal relationship with my coworkers.” The discussion about the individual profiles brought many insights. The CCD–team agreed on their current culture. “We have our little differences but we all agree that clan culture is dominant.” The next step was to define what exactly was their clan culture.
Organizational Culture Change

Customize Current Culture

Doing this step creates awareness and insights into current work habits and culture. A collective willingness to change could emerge. People sometimes want to skip the step – “We don’t have much time. Let’s start working on the future.” However, it’s important that you first customize the results of your current culture. Going quickly and saying “Clan culture is fine” is not enough because you need insight and agreement on where you are – including behaviors. These are the details that matter.

We have to understand the subtleties of our current whereabouts to discover what details could make a difference, how to change and what not to do, knowing us. These specific stories and examples don’t come from the Competing Values Framework. They can be mapped in the framework, but they are specific for your organization.

ABCDE

We’re looking for examples of the current culture. Remember the ABCDE scheme – if you have enough time. Start with the A – “We Are” – this is the organization’s identity. Think of your mission and vision. Think big values and concepts – core beliefs. Some examples: “We are helpful.” Or: “I do therefore I am.”

B – “We believe” – discuss with your group what is important and what is not. When is our work adequate? Who is successful and why? What beliefs back that up? What are our collective assumptions? What beliefs are visible in our work-
Do you understand your Current Culture?

place? For instance: “Money matters more than clients.” Or: “If a coworker asks your support, you must always help.” Or: “Never give unpleasant feedback, always keep it nice and cozy.” The list of beliefs is endless, but only a few collective beliefs will be key to the culture and to the change.

The next step is C: make a list of the organization’s competencies, capabilities, resources, your unique selling points – what is it that we CAN do? “We’re good at delivering in time,” etc. “We never say no, so you will get any extra service.”

D: how do we behave? What do we do? What events and anecdotes are typical for us? What happens in our workplace? Find a lot of examples. This is the way we DO things around here. This is where we must change habits...or nothing will change at all. Find the key behaviors that define us.

Last, but not least, is E: the effects and environment. When we look around, what kind of environment have we created? What results do we generate? ABCDE is very systematically defining your current culture. You have the broad concept of clan culture and you’re going to fill in the details. This is an extensive process but it yields insights and awareness of your current culture. Especially the 2B’s will be useful when you develop your change program: Beliefs and Behaviors.

ABCDE Levels of Current Culture

• A: We Are - Our vision and Mission
• B: Beliefs - What is important? What do we omit? When is work adequate? Who is succesfull and why?
• C: Competencies - Our competencies, resources and unique selling points are...?
• D: Do - How do we behave? What events are typical for us?
• E: Effects - What can be seen in our environment? What effects do we cause?

CCD used a quick tour through ABCDE

Their identity – level A – “We are warm and caring; like a mother or a warm bath.” Remember, how they were founded a few decades ago by some parents...? It was still part of their identity, though all team members were hired as professionals.
B – their core belief was “Clients matter most.” They are disabled and they need the best. Solidarity is key. If you don’t share this belief you don’t fit in here.

C – what are our competencies and capabilities? “We can deliver the best possible care. We have an expert team of therapists and our buildings look like home. We really make it cozy and we are the best care providers because we do it from our heart.”

At level D, what do they do? They give extra attention. They go the extra mile for their clients. Anything is possible. When somebody is feeling depressed, a caretaker will sit with that person until they feel better. They will do anything for you – bring you an extra cup of tea, even if they don’t have time. You will see people chat, take time for clients and colleagues.

E – Their environment, their buildings are cozy like a home. Everybody feels comfortable and safe. But there’s another effect – caretakers get very tired because they bring that extra cup of tea but they don't have time. There are other clients – it’s slightly chaotic. Sitting with a client means my coworkers have to look after other patients. Coworkers are burdened but personally, giving extra attention feels good – making a difference for this client.

Last but not least, we don’t like our administrative tasks and since we have little time, we will procrastinate and then skip them. Our files are not complete. So this is our culture. It’s warm but also a bit chaotic and not really businesslike. Results are not on our mind at all. This is how you define a current culture. You go from ABCD down to E. If you think it’s too comprehensive for your participants to work with ABCDE, you could focus on behaviors only, level D. Behaviors are key – if they don’t change, nothing really changes. You could use this schedule and find out: “Clan culture – it means and doesn’t mean …” Work your way through all four culture types.

What does it mean for us, that we have this much clan culture?

The CCD defined their current clan culture. “Our clan culture means … we go all the way for our clients. What doesn’t it mean? Clan culture does not mean that we take care of our coworkers enough, because if I sit with that client who needs a talk, my colleagues have to do more. I know that they are tired.” This is another way of defining your current culture.

You can do the same for every culture type. Adhocracy culture – what does it mean and what does it not mean? Hierarchy culture, market culture …
In the CCD example, clan culture means listening to employees and clients. Always care, take time for people, but it also means lots of meetings and deliberations. It does not mean that they chat all day; it does not mean that coworkers are close friends who meet in their spare time. Their adhocracy culture means that you can improvise whenever you feel like it. You can change routines because you’d like to try something new. It does not mean keeping track of changes and new ideas. So innovations only spread when we talk about it.

Market culture – it means that they dislike targets. We don’t like money and goals. It’s got nothing to do with us. It’s not why we work here. It feels like the opposite of taking the best possible care of disabled people.

Hierarchy culture means governance, procedures, safety and quality manuals. They have to be present but we don’t like them. That’s why we’re behind in administration all the time.

**Finding examples of current culture**

In your workshop, you can ask people to do this in little groups – two or three persons – to inspire each other to come up with a lot of examples. Sometimes people do this individually and then get back in the group to discuss the results.

Sometimes it’s difficult. Some people are not used to thinking of human behavior. “I cannot come up with examples.” Simply start in the other direction – ask for their irritations. This could provide the best entrance to their memory.
“What is really annoying you at work? What should change immediately?” Irritations are easily remembered. “What is wrong here? What do we miss? It is a shame that … this should not happen again.”

Make a list of incidents, behaviors, examples. Then analyze: if this is happening, what does it mean? What do we believe apparently? Is this an example of adhocracy? Hierarchy? Market? Clan? Entice people to come up with examples and categorize them in the right culture types. Then they will start thinking about their culture. Take as much time as the group needs and address the issues that need to be dealt with first.

The process itself is current culture

The process – anything that happens in the workshop – is an expression of current culture. Maybe they like to work in an organized way: an expression of their hierarchy culture. Is it the CEO or the team leader who speaks first all the time? What happens if you ask one of the others to give their view?

If current culture entails more or less counterproductive habits, you should deal with those first. Intervene if there are sick jokes or personal attacks. Ask a lot of questions if the leader speaks and the others remain silent. Share your observations with the group to make them more aware of current culture. It’s your job as a workshop leader to help them “see” their culture. Ask them “why”.

“Why are there so little examples of irritations while the profile shows a huge gap with preferred culture? You seem to be dissatisfied?” “Why does no one speak up? What do you need to share 10 points that should be improved?” “I have heard person A contribute many ideas. Why are the others silent? Is this an example of current culture? What does it mean?”

Sometimes people need to be enticed to open up, even when there are no major distrust or safety issues. You could have them write down examples and throw all the papers in a basket, discussing them one by one without knowing who contributed the example. You could have them share examples in groups of three and ask them to share one example that was not their own in the plenary group.

This may take possible shyness away and may help everyone to open up.

Do anything that is necessary to get this group feeling safe, sharing their ideas and feeling equal, for the moment, in this workshop. It is great if people leave their formal positions at the doorstep and contribute equally.
Current Culture: Irritations?

- What is wrong here?
- What do we miss?
- What should change now?

Current culture as an image

The ABCDE scheme and the forms – what it means and what it does not mean – represent an analytical way of understanding current culture. Some groups may benefit from a “right side brain” approach. Ask them for metaphors, or have people make a drawing of the current culture or even create a “group tableau” together, taking positions and postures in the space of the room.

Current Culture: Diving for the Iceberg

- If this happens, what does it mean?
- What do we believe or assume, apparently?
- Current collective beliefs are...

An image can reveal other aspects of culture and might communicate its core. Images are easily remembered. Ask the group to draw or act their current culture
as a personality type. If your current culture walks into the room right now, what
does he or she look like? Is it an old woman or a young man? Are they relaxed or
uptight? These metaphors often entail instant recognition, reveal core features that
might otherwise have stayed tacit because they go beyond analytical thinking. This
way of understanding current culture may make people more aware of it.

In the case of the care center for disabled people, they shared an anecdote. “We
really care for disabled people. One of our clients only calmed down in a warm bath
so we built him a bath instead of the showers. It was great to see how this client
thrived on taking baths.”

**Summary**

The workshop is held with a small group where everyone is enticed to contribute
equally. We have made sure that our participants feel comfortable. We offer a quick
recap of the Competing Values Framework and present their OCAI Profile. Then a
respectful dialogue about the overall outcome may begin.

We spend as much time as necessary on understanding and reaching consensus
about the current culture. We need to understand the details and the typical appear-
ances of this current culture – we need specific examples, precise incidents, typical
events, shared meanings, collective criteria and beliefs.

We start digging for the iceberg, we try to grasp what is taken for granted, the
behaviors no–one will normally notice, the decisions no one will question because
they are simply “the way we do things around here”. We give our participants new
glasses to help them see a new perspective: “Yes, this is our current culture!”

Meanwhile, the process IS the current culture. Share your observations with the
group to make them more aware. Help them overcome obstacles to a safe space and
productive group process.